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ABSTRACT

This discussion of the mentor/protege relationship in the library setting begins by examining the benefits of mentoring for both individuals and the organization. Characteristics of mentors, guidelines for self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses for a potential mentor, and protege characteristics that will attract a mentor are outlined. Communication skills essential to mentoring are then described, including active listening, giving and receiving feedback, counseling, coaching, and managing conflict and disagreement. Conditions within the organization that encourage or discourage the development of mentor relationships are summarized, and the paper concludes with a discussion of ways that librarians can promote leadership through mentoring. (10 references) (MES)

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MENTORING FOR LEADERSHIP

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MENTORING FOR LEADERSHIP

> Mentors take risks with people. They bet initially on talent they perceive in younger people. Mentors also risk emotional involvement in working closely with their juniors. The risks do not always pay off, but the willingness to take them appears crucial in developing leaders (Zaleznik 76).

A mentor is a seasoned professional who takes an active interest in the career development of a younger or less experienced professional. The mentor, by turns, serves as a teacher, sponsor, protector, promoter, coach, counselor, and role model. In my own career, someone took the risk of becoming my mentor, and it has been one of the most valuable and important factors in the development of my professional and leadership abilities. I am no longer a novice to the library profession, and my mentor and I have parted. However, I have retained a lasting appreciation for this individual and a great support for and interest in the process of mentoring. The library field is full of talented professionals and leaders, and mentoring is one avenue for sharing and developing this talent in other members of the profession.

What are the benefits to the mentor, the protege, and

the library organization that make the mentor/protege function worth developing? What besides the ability to take risks does it take to be a mentor? What does the protege need to bring to the relationship? What specific communication skills can facilitate the mentoring process? How does the quality of communication within the organization affect the success of the mentor/protege relationship? What steps can librarians take to insure more mentoring within the profession? This paper is an exploration of the answers to these questions.

BENEFITS OF MENTORING

Mentoring can be a mutually enhancing relationship for both individuals involved. Having a protege can assist in the mentor's job performance. The protege can help with projects and work assignments, provide fresh ideas and feedback, and free up time for the mentor to fulfill other responsibilities (Zey 80). The mentor may also find that mentoring develops his own reputation as a leader and speeds his advancement within the organization.

> When [proteges] perform well, [they] refelect favorably upon [their] mentors. This serves to validate [the] mentors' worth and good judgment -- not only to themselves, but in the eyes of their bosses" (Phillips-Jones 55).

Organizations value managers who can attract and develop bright, hard-working individuals. Furthermore, having someone who knows how to do his job allows the mentor the possibility of moving to higher levels of responsiblity without leaving a

hole within the organization.

The rewards for the mentor are not all in terms of career support and advancement. There are also psychic rewards. Mentors develop greater self-esteem and competence by sharing their knowledge and skills with someone who admires and values their advice and counsel (Kram 7). In addition, the challenge and stimulation of assisting in another's career can provide increased job satisfaction for the mentor.

> The mentor is doing something for himself. He is making productive use of his own knowledge and skills in middle age. He is learning in ways not otherwise thought possible. He is maintaining his connection with the forces of youthful energy in the world and in himself. He needs the recipient of mentoring as much as the recipient needs him (Levinson 253).

While being mentored the protege will work hard, but he will also find that mentoring provides an education and opportunities for growth unavailable in the typical graduate school of Library Science. My own experience as a protege is typical of the benefits available. Mentors provide advice and support for career goals. My mentor and I evaluated my professional strengths and weaknesses. She then helped me map out strategies to enhance my technical and people skills. She provided me with opportunities and challenging work assignments. She allowed me access to information and resources and treated me as a peer. She gave me the freedom to fail, but also the help and advice to keep me from making the same mistakes again. She supported my progress and

growth as a professional and encouraged me to attempt tasks I might have otherwise thought myself incapable of accomplishing. She introduced me to her network of contacts within the library profession. She invited me to attend professional meetings with her and occasionally allowed me to attend in her place. She increased my exposure and visibility within the organization and taught me about its structure, politics and people. This information was often crucial to my job performance and would have taken a great deal of time to assimilate on my own. She critiqued, counseled, and corrected. Her character, integrity and friendship provided me with a role model professionally and personally.

Because mentoring can have such influence on the lives and careers of the mentor and the protege, it also affects and benefits the organization. In The Mentor Connection, Michael Zey identifies a number of ways in which mentoring helps the organization (95-106).

> ...through mentoring the goals, moral precepts, cultural tastes, and proscriptions of the organzation become more acceptable to the young manger. He feels that he is being introduced to these concepts and values, not impersonally, but by a "friend" (95).

By integrating the individual and recognizing his potential, frustration is lessened and turnover is reduced. The protege also serves as a communications link between levels of the organization. The protege operates on his own level while at the same time having access to information and viewpoints

taking place at the mentor's level. In this way, communication can flow up and down between organizational levels. Another organizational benefit of mentoring is that it enables the transfer of skills from the senior to the junior member. This in turn facilitates managerial succession. Finally, mentoring benefits the organization in terms of productivity. It helps create an environment in which ideas can be "developed, nurtured, experimented with, and successfully introduced . . ." (106).

CHARACTERISTICS OF MENTORS AND PROTEGES

Nancy W. Collins, in her book Professional Women and their Mentors, identifies five characteristics as necessary for an individual to function as a mentor. First, the mentor must be higher up the organizational ladder than the protege. Second, the mentor must possess greater experience and knowledge of the profession than the protege. Often this means that the mentor is older, but it is greater experience and not necessarily age which is the factor. Third, the mentor must have influence and "be close to the lines of authority and power" (7). The degree of influence and power may vary within the levels of the organization. Fourth, the mentor must be sincerely interested in the growth and development of the protege. The mentor is recognizing the protege's potential, and she should like and respect this person. Fifth, the mentor must be willing to commit time and emotion to the relationship. "There is mutual trust and

caring, confidentiality, and a willingness to develop and foster the relationship" (7-8). In addition to these five factors, one other element must be present -- access. The mentor and protege must have opportunities for frequent interaction.

Even with these factors present the individual contemplating mentoring for the first time should examine her motives and goals before initiating a mentor/protege relationship. The prospective mentor should identify why she wants to be a mentor and what her expectations are in terms of her own career needs. "The person who can command respect through performance, professional stature or interpersonal abilities is perceived as a good mentor candidate" (Zey 169). Each individual should review what she can contribute in terms of skills and experience, and honestly assess both her strengths and weaknesses.

Answering the following questions can assist in this review.

1. Are you good at what you do?
2. Are you able to teach and share your knowledge with others?
3. Are you able to encourage and motivate others?
4. Are you able to recognize talent?
5. Are you able to be demanding?
6. Are you able to be supportive?
7. Do you set high performance standards?
8. Are you willing to share credit with another

individual?

9. Are you able to publicize a proteges' achievements?

10. Are you able to let go when the time comes? (Phillips-Jones 188; Missirian 91)

If after completing this self-review, the prospective mentor is ready to go forward, the next step is to develop a set of criteria identifying desired characteristics in a protege. These criteria will, of course, vary from individual to individual. Some mentors seek proteges similar to themselves; others seek proteges whose talents complement their own. Once these criteria are established, the mentor should measure the qualifications of prospective proteges against them.

How does the librarian who wants to become a protege be get the recognition of a mentor? Most proteges are "not sitting patiently at their desks waiting to be 'discovered'" (Missirian 97). They are hard at work within their organizations developing their professional skills. The following are some of the characteristics identified as attracting a mentor to a protege:

1. Intelligence
2. Enthusiasm
3. Ambition
4. Loyalty
5. Dedication
6. Integrity
7. Professional competence

8. A desire to learn

9. Commitment to the organization

10. Ability to accept responsibility

11. Ability to take initiative

12 Ability to work with others

13. Ability to listen

14. Ability to speak up and at times disagree

15. Ability to ask for guidance

16. Willingness to speak up and at time to disagree (Zey 175,182; Missirian 98; Phillips-Jones 98-99)

One of the most important things the prospective protege can do is to know that she wants to be developed.

> You must know you need special coaching or grooming and be willing to learn for this kind of relationship to develop. Be willing to admit you don't know everything about certain areas. It is also important not to get caught up in a mentor's style that is not your own. It is necessary to be yourself. You can observe someone else's pattern, but you need to be comfortable in developing your own style against their framework (Collins 36).

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND MENTORING

"Mentoring . . . is an interpersonal exchange requiring one-to-one communication skills . . . With such a personal approach, communication must be open and trusting, objective, and frank as well as helpful" (Conroy and Jones 40-41). The functions of mentoring are limited or enhanced to the extent that the individuals in the mentor/protege relationship have mastered communication skills such as active listening, giving and receiving feedback, counseling, coaching, and managing conflict and disagreement (Kram 41).

Listening involves the attempt to understand and interpret what others are saying from their point of view. We must ascertain both the literal meaning and the intention of the message. People spend more time on listening than on any other aspect of communication, but few people have any real training in how to listen. As a "result research shows that most people listen at twenty-five percent efficiency. That doesn't mean they actually heard twenty-five percent of what was said; that means of what they heard, they got twenty-five percent of it right" (Conroy and Jones 114). Listening is not a passive activity, and one way of improving our ability is to practice active listening.

Active listening involves listening to a speaker with the intention of understanding the message from the speaker's point of view. Often instead of listening to the speaker, the listener begins to evaluate and think about the speaker's motive or to think about how she wishes to respond. These dilemmas can be avoided by practicing the strategies of active listening. First, anticipate where the conversation is leading. Second, objectively consider the statments being made. Third, mentally review and summarize what is being said. Fourth, be attentive to non-verbal as well as verbal messages. Fifth, use techniques such as paraphrasing, probing and perception checking to test whether the message has been received accurately.

Paraphrasing involves restating back to the speaker

what you believe he has said. For example, "What I hear you saying is . . ." It is not merely parroting back to the individual the same words he has just spoken. The purpose is to show the other person how well you understand his message, not whether you agree or disagree with it. Therefore, paraphrasing should be descriptive rather than evaluative. In addition to clarifying meaning, paraphrasing also helps the other individual know the listener is interested in him.

Probing is the use of clarifying questions by the listener to verify the speaker's message. Questions such as, "Do I understand you to mean . . .?" are clarifying. They allow the listener to paraphrase the speaker and give the speaker the opportunity to correct any misconceptions. It also communicates to the speaker that you are indeed listening and are interested in understanding, rather than just hearing, what is being said.

Perception checking relates to the feelings which are being communicated by the message. It is a measure of the emotional content rather than the ideas being stated. Instead of describing what the speaker has said, the listener attempts to describe what he believes the speaker is feeling. The purpose is to identify the speaker's feelings not to judge, evaluate or interpret them. Often feelings are incorrectly identified by the listener, therefore it is important to check these perceptions.

Feedback is the response which the receiver of the

message gives back to the sender. It indicates that the listener has received the message and allows her to clarify the messages's meaning. Feedback can be utilized most effectively if the following guidelines are considered.

1. Feedback should be timely. Feedback given too late can be ineffective. Feedback is most effective when given as soon as possible after the message is received. It should also be given at a time when the individual receiving it is attentive and listening.

2. Feedback should be descriptive rather than evaluative. It should involve a clear report of the facts, not an analysis of them. Evaluate only if asked to do so and when it is appropriate.

3. Feedback should be offered not imposed. Does the other individual want feedback?

4. Feedback should take into account the needs of the receiver.

5. Feedback should be specific rather than general.

6. Feedback should be focused on things which can be changed.

7. Feedback should be given to be helpful.

If you are the individual desiring feedback, you can assist the other individual by clearly stating exactly what it is you would like feedback about. Once the feedback has been given, clarify that you have heard the message accurately. Share your responses to the feedback. Let the other individual know what was helpful and how it was helpful.

In counseling . . .

> the individual finds a forum in which to talk openly about anxieties, fears, and ambivalence that detract from productive work. The more experienced senior colleague provides a sounding board for this self-exploration, offers personal experience as an

> alternative perspective, and helps resolve problems through feedback and active listening (Kram 36).

When acting as a counselor, the role of the mentor is to listen, observe and clarify. It is not to evaluate nor to give advice. The counselor's goal is to help the protege realize she can develop her own solutions for dealing with problems.

Coaching is another communication role sometimes assumed by the mentor. Coaching implies working with someone to help him perform at higher levels. The mentor offers specific feedback about how the protege can improve. It can involve sharing knowledge about how to improve a presentation, whom to contact for information, or how to handle increased job responsiblities. The mentor is showing the protege how to do something better.

The ability to manage conflict and disagreement is one of the most vital skills of leadership.

> Conflict is a completely natural activity. It is a healthy activity that promotes creativity and forces people to defend their positions and to strive for what will most benefit the and perhaps in the long run, the organization. Conflict should be avoided only when it is nonproductive . . . (Bogard 115).

In Improving Communication in the Library, Conroy and Jones state, "Communication is very often what gets us into conflict in the first place, and it can also be what keeps the conflict going or resolves it" (101). They offer these methods for using communication to help end conflict.

> 1. Examine the language individuals use to describe the conflict. Then try to get them to change their

perception of the conflict by re-labeling it. Disasters, battles and stand-offs can also be referred to as challenges, opportunities for change, or just problems.

2. Put active listening to use. Be clear about exactly what is being said and what is not being said. Charged emotions often distort the ability to listen preceptively.

3. Check your perceptions with the other individual. Attempt to clarify and amplify your understanding of him. This can begin to indentify where the conflict lies.

4. State the other side's postion as articulately as you can and demonstrate the ability to listen accurately and be objective.

5. State your position in terms of "I" messages rather than "You" messages. Claim ownership for your feelings rather than placing the responsibility for them on others.

6. Describe your own feelings to help others understand your nonverbal messages.

7. Clarify the goals and purposes of each side in the. disagreement. Establish criteria for evaluating proposed solutions in terms of these goals and purposes.

8. Try to identify and emphasize areas of agreement.

9. Break large conflicts into sub-issues and address these smaller issues one at a time rather than trying to resolve everything at once (101-103).

These skills in active listening, giving and receiving feedback, counseling, coaching, and managing conflict and disagreement are foundational to establishing relationships which can lead to mentoring.

> The lack of self-awareness and interpersonal skills limits the availability of mentor relationships . . . If individuals do not understand what they need for relationships and developmental opportunities, they will be unable to actively manage their careers (Kram 199).

COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

The nature of the organization can either encourage or discourage the development of mentor relationships. Kathy Kram identifies certain conditions which must exist before the benefits of mentoring can be realized.

1. There need to be opportunities for Frequent and open interaction between managers at different career stages and hierarchical levels.

2. Individuals must have the interpersonal skills to to create and sustain helpful relationships. They must also have an interest and desire to do this.

3. The "organization's reward system, culture and norms must value and encourage relationship building activities" (160).

Obstacles occur when the organization does not value the development of human resources, and the design of work can also influence how relationships develop. Work which is highly individualized makes it difficult to initiate relationships. In contrast, collaborative projects or team work can help to foster the development of supportive relationships (161-164).

> Equally important are the culture's values about the kinds of communication, the degree to which individuals can trust each other (particularly at different hierarchical levels), and the extent to which openness and trust are valued. When the culture perpetuates closed and superficial communication, and when a lack of trust for those in authority prevails, it is difficult to provide mentoring functions. Meaningful coaching, counseling, friendship, and role modeling are almost impossible in a situation characterized by low trust and minimal communication (164).

The final obstacle to mentoring is the failure to communicate and to create an awareness of its potential.

ROLE OF LIBRARIANS

It is unrealistic to expect that all newcomers to the library profession will have mentors, but those of us who are interested in and value mentoring can take steps to see that more of it takes place. I support the statement that "the mentor relationship can perhaps be facilitated but not legislated . . ." (Shapiro 56). I do not believe that that the answer to more and better mentoring lies in formal programs where mentors and proteges are assigned to one another. I believe that the answer lies in the preparations we make, our ability to risk initiating relationships, and our desire to help one another become better at what we do. We can encourage the development of better interpersonal and communication skills through education and practice. We can examine our organizational structures to see if they promote collaboration and teamwork, and we can encourage organizational climates which value and reward the development of human resources. In these ways we can promote leadership through mentoring.

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